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EASTTIMOR AND GERMANY

I) The position of the German government concerning East Timor

If you try to make a link between Germany and Easttimor, you will - at the first glance - find it very hard, because this remote area of the world is at the moment not a topic in the German public; it hardly ever was, except, maybe, right after the Dili massacre in 1991.
Most of the Germans don't even know where Easttimor is, much less what is happening there. Without regard to a couple of 'freaks', of course.
You hardly ever find any information or report on Easttimor in a newspaper or magazine.
But in my opinion the truth is, that it is too hot a topic, to be discussed in public, because the German government is not innocent at all. Especially in respect of 'our good friend' and customer Indonesia, which we of course don't want to irritate, Germany, one of the main weapon exporteurs to Indonesia - and in the whole world -, has to be carefull. Especially now, with the tense situation on the German labour market and the load of debts after the German reunification. Weapon exporting combines like MBB, Daimler-Benz AG or Siemens provide a huge amount of labour and there are enough other countries, ready to take over its position - number three in the world of weapon exporteurs.

Once you start. to ask questions regarding Indonesia, Easttimor and the sale of weapons, the members of the government react very sensitive, because, indeed. there is a link.

Germany, one of the richest and most developed western industrialised nations, regards itself as a strong advocate and defender of the human rights and, of course, will stress that position again at the UN World Human Rights Conference in Vienna, with a set of beautifull and euphoric words.
An outcry went throughout my country, when Iraq occupated Kuwait, just to mention one example, because every people has the right of self-determination, hasn't it.

But some are more equal than others and some principles die quickly. Especially, if it is coming to money.

It is a shame for me as German to admit it, but the rumor came up that, right after the German ambassador in Jakarta presented my governments written condemnation of the Dili massacre to President Soeharto, he confirmed him that he had to do this to keep up appearences, but the Indonesians should not take it too earnest; the German-Indonesian relationship would not be concerned.

So unfortunately, it can't be expected too much support of the German government regarding East Timor.

As soon as I knew about the topic of my paper, I sent a letter to the German Department of Foreign Affairs and asked Foreign Minister Kinkel to clarify and explain the position of the government concerning East Timor and especially the Human Rights situation there. But I actually didn't have much hope to receive an answer.

To my surprise I already got an answer about one week later from one of the ministers assistants.

He wrote - and here I quote - "the human rights situation in East Timor is not satisfying", but "the government supports the efforts of the UN General Secretary to bring about a just, far reaching and international acceptable solution of the East Timor question under full consideration of the legitim interests and expectations of the East Timorese people". According to the government that is the proper way to solve the problem.

Besides it was written that "the German government uses its close and manifold connections with Indonesia, to exercise its influence in favour of the respect of the human rights in East Timor and other parts of Indonesia. In that sense the Bundeskanzler has also been talking to President Soeharto during his stay in Indonesia". He did not explain or specify this statement any further.

He further stated that the German government did not provide any military help, but in the next paragraph he already brought that statement ad absurdum, when he - without being asked on that special issue - mentioned the last transaction between the German and Indonesian governments, which is the recent sale of 39 "partly

demilitarised" NVA war ships, heritage of the former German Dermocratic Republic.
I was told that the Indonesian government bound itself in a contract, to use those ships exclusively to protect its coast lines and trade routes and to prevent smuggling, especially drugsmuggling.
The letter closed with the statement that those ships could not be used in East Timor anyway!
(I doubt actually that minister Kinkel has ever seen my letter, but got the impression that it was just a prepared piece of paper, that everybody got who asked about Indonesia in general or East Timor in specific.)

› On the other hand the head of the Marine Information Department Wibowo stated in an 'Kompas'-interview (13th January) very clearly that 19 of those ships would be stationed in the West (probably to prevent further escapes of Acehnese to Malaysia, like it happened last year, when 400 Acehnese succeeded in escaping - also a way to 'protect' ones borders); the rest will be stationed in the east part of Indonesia, probably also around Timor. ‹

In regard to that letter I asked for further information and details from the Department of Foreign Affairs on the following points:
1. What, in the departments opinion, could be regarded as military help, if not the sale of war ships and the training of the crew in Germany itself.
2. If, taken for granted that East Timor was the 27th province of Indonesia, it did not have a right of its coastline being protected.
3. In which area Indonesia had a grave problem with drug smuggling.
4. Finally, why those NVA (National Peoples Army) could not be used in East Timor. They are partly landing boats, built to land tanks, transporters and other military equipment and some of those ships still carry rocket-apparatuses.
(I haven't received an answer on this letter, yet, but I hope I will be able to provide it at the symposium in Lisbon.)

The problem is, once you start to ask questions on weapon sales you will find a wall of silence; the German government prefers not to give any comment.
And in the opinion of the German government Indonesia is not a 'critical area'.

II) Opinion and awareness of the German public

Yet, that all doesn't mean that there is no awareness or interest in the German public; it is mostly a lack of information. It is quite possible to raise that awareness by the means of information campaigns or by 'creating events', as the incident in Peenemünde 29th - 31st May showed. And the more spctacular the events are, the more public attention and press covering you get.

Peenemünde is a town on the small island of usedom in the East Sea.
During GDR times the whole NVA-Navy was stationed there and Peenemünde used to be military prohibited area. The main part of the NVA war ships, which were sold to Indonesia for 12,74 mio US $, still anchors in the harbor since 1989. (It was actually planed to scrap them, but the sale was much more lucrative for the German economy, because the orders to reequip and restore them got back to Germany.
Those orders alone are worth around 327 mio US $.
Altogether this transaction will cost Indonesia around 2 billion US $.
Besides there are negotiations about a further deal; Indonesia ordered another three new submarines, which means another 40 mio US $.)

The deal was arranged by the Indonesian Minister for Research and Technology Habibie, who has - as is well known - an especially good relationship with Germany and the weapon producing Giant MBB, as one of its former managers. And it is him, not the generals, who gets three percent provision out of the sale.

It is obvious that the use of those ships will not be as peacefull as the German government tries to make us believe. Especially in a country that answers every sign and every claim of indipendence with terror and massacres and suppresses the people of Aceh, West Papua and East Timor with torture and military power. And, as you all know, in East Timor alone died around 200.000 people between 1975 and 1979, one third of the population.

The indignation about that policy lead on the weekend of the 29th-31st May to a demonstration and the occupation of the NVA ships. An alliance of different East German peace groups and the Berlin NGO Watch Indonesia called for a 'festival of peace' in Peenemünde. The unguarded ships were occupated and covered with transparents reminding of the killings committed by the Indonesian Army. Because the police was absolutely unprepared the ships could be entered without being held back and the *occupants* stayed there for three days.
(About seven demonstrants expressed beforehand that they would stay, untill they were detained by the police, what finally happened. But they had already consulted their lawyers and one day later they were released.)

A lot of tourists and Peenemünde inhabitants, who were there by pure coincidence, came around curiously to watch the peacefull demonstration and accepted readily the handed out information brochures. In talks with the demonstrators they expressed their support and indignation about the procedure of the government.

Fortunately the demonstration got a far reaching press covering, which shows that it is possible to wake up the public opinion.

But I doubt that this will have any influence on further weapon sales.
The pressure on the government must become much stronger, before they will even think about preventing those transactions. The lobby of the dealers is too enormous and unfortunately they have the money and the protectors.

It seems to be a fight David vs.Goliath.